

The Ballarat Naturalist

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“Stringy’s Tree” in the Cobbobonee National Park is estimated to be more than 45m high (150 ft) and was a highlight of the field trip to Portland for SEANA’s Autumn camp out.

The tree is a Messmate Stringybark (*Eucalyptus obliqua*)
More in this edition. (Photo: Kathy Elder)

Creeks and Wetlands west of Ballarat

(Excursion Sunday 3 April, led by Andy Arnold.)

Field Naturalists gathered at Gillies Street refreshed by the extra hour of sleep due to the end of daylight saving.

Andy gave everyone excursion notes outlining the sites we were going to visit and street directions to all of the stops.

Our first stop was Flax Mill Swamp Wildlife Reserve in Gregory St West that is part of the Hopkins River Catchment. We could see a gentle rise to the south which is the divide between the south and west flowing streams. Water flows in to the swamp from the surrounding industrial land and overflows through a drain leading in to Mullahwallah and then Burrumbeet Creek.

We then drove to the housing estate developed on the previous site of Ballarat Golf Club to inspect the wetlands on the southern edge of Lake Gardens (see below). The wetlands are the beginning of Kensington Creek, in the Barwon basin. The well vegetated ponds filter water as it flows along the edge of the current Ballarat Golf Club. Black Duck and Swans were observed in the open water with Purple Swamphen and Dusky Moorhen.



South of Sturt St, Kensington Creek is diverted to flow through pipes under an old residential area of Alfredton. We walked into Warwick Park Reserve that has a low area which acts as a flood retarding basin when heavy rain falls.

South of Cuthberts Rd, Kensington Creek comes out of the pipes and flows through a wetland surrounded by suburban park at the Wensley Drive Reserve and Wetland. Kensington Creek then flows through open paddocks to Carngham Rd. No doubt the open land will be developed in the future.

Kensington Creek in Delacombe, just north of Greenhalghs Rd, has a wide strip of parkland with well -spaced trees. One of the Swamp Gums may have been a tree which survived the subdivision. Doug Dean Reserve, off Whitelaw Ave, Delacombe was our lunch stop. After lunch we returned to Kensington Creek in Delacombe, just south of Greenhalghs Rd (see below). The stream is littered with polystyrene which has blown off nearby building sites (see photo on p. 4).



FNCB group inspecting the Kensington Creek
at Winter Valley south of Greenhalghs Rd.

From a vantage point on Bells Rd we were able to see Winter Creek flowing from the west. Across paddocks we could see where the Kensington Creek flows into Winter Creek.

The roadside was covered by some excellent grassland vegetation including Kangaroo Grass (some in flower), Cranberry Heath, Bluebell (in flower), Pimelea, Bossiaea, Running Postman.



Polystyrene pollution - Bonshaw Creek

Returning along Bells Rd to the intersection with Ross Creek Road we parked in a disused section of Bells Rd and from an old bridge we could see the junction of Winter Creek and Bonshaw Creek flowing from the north. Water in both these creeks flows to the Yarrowee and Leigh Rivers before joining the Barwon River at Inverleigh and flowing in to the sea at Barwon Heads. Most people enjoyed the ripe blackberries for afternoon tea.

The final part of the excursion followed the Bonshaw Creek northwards. Parts of the creek in the lower area, which is still being grazed, had been fenced and a wide shelter belt of indigenous trees were growing well. Again we saw areas littered with polystyrene. A pair of Wedge-tail Eagles flying over the valley at the edge a housing subdivision was a thrill. North of the Glenelg Hwy the creek has been piped underground from Whitelaw Ave. The upper section of Bonshaw Creek flows through a narrow, weedy channel which ends at Heinz Rd just south of Latrobe St.

One feature of the excursion which surprised most of us was the vast areas which have been developed recently in housing estates on the south -west side of Ballarat.

We thanked Andy for his carefully researched information and for showing us areas of Ballarat which were not familiar to most of us.

John Gregurke



Head waters of Bonshaw Creek
at Heinz Rd off LaTrobe St Redan



At Bonshaw Creek

**“Establishing a Long Term Citizen Science
Biodiversity Monitoring Program to Inform Adaptive
Management”**
presented by Dr Greg Kerr

It was a special opportunity for the Field Nats and visiting BirdLife members to hear Dr Greg Kerr, Senior Ecologist at Nature Glenelg Trust, present his proposal for a citizen science project in the Glenelg Hopkins region.

Nature Glenelg Trust is a not-for-profit organisation with four key purposes: protecting and enhancing the natural environment, generating high quality scientific information, key conservation ecology research, and promoting public awareness of nature. Greg’s project brings these key purposes together to help address issues in the Western District environment, which has undergone significant modification since it was first settled.

Current challenges to the understanding and preservation of biodiversity in this region are that data is not collected systematically, natural history knowledge and skills are in decline, and data collection typically requires professionals who are costly and limited in number.

These challenges could be addressed through increasing the pool of skilled data collectors, reducing costs, and enabling a region-wide monitoring program based on sound scientific principles. Greg has seen the positive impact that these measures can have through previous implementation of citizen scientist projects in Ethiopia, Eyre Peninsula and Gariwerd.

In Humbo and Sodo (Ethiopia), forest clearing, grazing and erosion contributed significantly to the degradation of the environment and loss of local materials and resources. With Greg and World Vision’s assistance, locals were upskilled to identify and monitor birdlife, to collect data, and to run their very first survey. This resulted in the community getting their forest back, and regaining access to foods and medicines. The Humbo project enabled the first gold standard carbon credit Climate Community Biodiversity Standard in Africa, and both communities received money from the carbon credits.

The Eyre Peninsula is a large region containing rare and threatened bird populations. Greg’s citizen science project started by running 11 bird courses with nearly 220 people to build up their skills. He also connected people with specialists in the area, and designed a program across 355 sites to cover all vegetation types. Data was collected, validated and sent from South Australia to the Atlas Of Living Australia. Greg’s project resulted in over 190 trained bird monitoring volunteers and staff, and the development of a means for collecting and entering data.

Those involved in the program became less isolated and more connected with their community, gained valuable knowledge and skills which they maintained and shared across other programs, and gained a means of entering and sharing data across the region.

Over the past few years, Greg has been setting up the “Great Gariwerd Bird Survey,” monitoring the impact of cat baiting and fire management on bird diversity in the Grampians/Gariwerd National Park. As well as implementing a 10 week “birding” course, Greg analysed data on citizen’s skills acquisition by comparing their data collection to his own. Positively, Greg observed incremental improvement in the frequency of bird species identified by citizen scientists over time.

Greg’s vision is to establish a long term citizen scientist monitoring program across the Glenelg Hopkins region, to enable changes in bird diversity and determine their abundance in the future. As there are different habitats for different birds, Greg has generated 143 randomized 2-hectare monitoring sites, including mapping East-West and a North-South lines where changes might be observed. Eventually there will be 300 sites across the region. There are also plans for community and group-focused consultations to establish a management group that would maintain the project.

The project would greatly benefit from skilled volunteers from groups like the Field Naturalists and BirdLife to contribute to the completion of annual surveys. Greg plans on developing a log-in for the project and to collect initial data to establish a baseline.

Areas for further consideration include: how many 2-Hectare/20 minute surveys people would be able and willing to undertake, how to train more people and get more clubs involved, and how far people would be required to travel (i.e. location of sites).

Sheree Cartledge



Mount Damota in southern Ethiopia was one area where Greg Kerr inspired locals to conduct fauna surveys to improve their environment through a better understanding of biodiversity.

SEANA Autumn Camp at Portland

At the club's April meeting, John G reported on the Ramsar Wetlands field trip including sites like Long Swamp, to learn about the work undertaken by Nature Glenelg Trust and the subsequent improvements in habitat and environmental values.

The 15 attendees from FNCB learnt that the SEANA Spring Camp 2022 to be hosted by the Mornington Peninsula FNC will be based at Merricks, where accommodation and full catering will be provided for participants.

Bill and Kathy (and others) enjoyed a small boat trip to Lawrence Rocks, where they saw Australasian Gannets and seals and learnt about the harbour's history.

Andy A. gave an overview of the Budj Bim tour where the new visitor's centre is now almost complete. Their very experienced guide, Gunditjmara Man Braydon Saunders, gave them a great insight into the cultural history of the area. They explored the eel traps and weir installed to regulate the levels of Tae Rak (Lake Condah).

Andy also reported on the field trip to Cobbononee NP, led by Bob Hodgetts who had worked in the forests for many years, and noted the quality of the evening presentations.

Les H mentioned Soft Tree-ferns along Fitzroy River, the most westerly population of them in Victoria. Vanilla Orchids, Red-tipped Tiny Greenhoods and Hyacinth Orchids were also found.

Fran H. told us about one of the evening presentations: the fascinating video of the Surry River as seen by drone, showing the variation in bank vegetation, river breadth, etc along the entire length of the river.

Val H reported that Magpie Geese, six Brolgas and an Australian Hobby were some of the special birds observed at Pick Swamp.

Coastline
just west
of the
City of
Portland.





Typical SEANA convoy in Cobbobonee N.P.
This wonderful place offered a variety of environments from tall eucalypt forest to heathy scrublands to ferny gullies.



Lush fern gullies are a feature of Cobbobonee N.P.



Perfect weather in Portland to visit the seals and gannets
at nearby Lawrence Rocks



Lawrence Rocks is a short 6 km boat ride from Portland and
supports over 10% of the world's population of Australasian gannets.

Excerpts from FNCB Club Meeting Minutes held 7.30pm, April 1, 2022 via Zoom

Attendance: President Margaret Rich welcomed 23 members and five visitors (G. Kerr, I. Veltheim, P. Hammond, A. Ashton and S. Davison).

Apologies: S. Faull, M. Moravec, C. Hall, B. Cheesman and A. Grant.

Motion: that the Apologies be accepted.

Moved: G. Lunt *Seconded:* F. Hanrahan *Carried.*

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Motion: that the Minutes of the previous Meeting (March 4, 2022) be accepted as a true and accurate record.

Moved: C. Dalman *Seconded:* A. Arnold *Carried.*

Business Arising from Correspondence:

Sheree Cartledge was accepted by the Committee as a new member in March. Please welcome her warmly.

Carmel Anderson and Norman Abjorensen have applied for a family membership.

Motion: That Carmel and Norman be accepted into membership of the FNCB.

Moved: B. Elder *Seconded:* V. Hocking *Carried.*

Reports:

Treasurer's Report

Opening bal \$ 8,449.90

Income \$ 840.00

Expenses: \$ 328.00

Closing bal. \$ 8,961.90

Kathy thanked members who have already paid their membership fee and mentioned that the easiest way to pay is via EFT.

Motion: that the Treasurer's Report be accepted and tabled invoice for newsletter printing be approved for payment.

Moved: K. Elder *Seconded:* L. Hanrahan *Carried.*

General Business

Please get your thinking caps on for suggestions, ideas or requests for guest speakers, topics, field trip destinations or leaders for the coming year and pass them on to a Committee Member.

For everyone's information, Vireya has kindly offered to take on the role of Club representative in all things iNaturalist, including correspondence relating to the Great Southern BioBlitz later in the year.

Excursions and Meetings coming up

May Friday 6th Club meeting 7.30 pm via Zoom. Members will receive a link a few days prior. Guest speakers Geraldine and Geoff Harris will regale us on “Nature-based travel in Queensland”.

Saturday 7th Excursion to Creswick Regional Park and the La Gerche Trail to be led by John Petheram and Margaret Rich. Depart 1 pm from Fed Uni Car Park, Gillies St. (Bring a flask, snack, chair).

We will follow the Great Divide to look at (1) the origins of three major river catchment, (2) productivity and C Sequestration of main forest types, and (3) the way early water merchants captured and distributed water for sale and use on the Creswick Goldfields. Stops and walks will show two less well-known water races built by Chinese merchants, as well as dams and races built by Irish, Canadian and American entrepreneurs.

June Friday 3rd Club meeting 7.30 pm via Zoom. Members will receive a link a few days prior. Our own fungi expert Les Hanrahan is presenting on Fungi.

Sunday 5th Excursion. Les Hanrahan will lead an excursion focussed on fungi. Destination to be determined.

We continue to abide by current COVID rules and restrictions.

Please note that you must be fully-vaccinated when taking part in face-to-face club activities.

If you are not well or are suffering any flu-like symptoms, please stay at home to minimise the risk to others.

Committee

President	Margaret Rich
Secretary	Emily Noble
Treasurer	Kathy Elder
Committee	Andy Arnold
	Bernadette Cheesman
	Bill Elder
	Val Hocking
	Graeme Lunt
	John Petheram

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Meetings - may continue to be held via Zoom.

Members will be kept informed of arrangements each month.

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